

This was the final project for the Ethnomusicology 20C (Musical Cultures of the World: Asia) course, taught by Professor Katherine In-Young Lee in Fall 2020 at UCLA. Students worked in groups to research and conduct an oral history with one of seven musicians who also served as a guest lecturer for the course. Each of the narrators are highly esteemed musicians with long professional careers in music performance. They also serve as important liaisons between their home countries in East, South, and Southeast Asia and the United States.

Profile of Abhiman Kaushal

Professor Abhiman Kaushal is a renowned tabla player in India and across the world. He began learning tabla at the age of five from his father, R B Kaushal, but was eventually taken on by the master Ustad Shaik Dawood as well as his senior-most disciple, Pandit B Nandkumar later on in life. Abhiman's musical foundation is in Hindustani classical music but he has participated in various collaborations since moving to the United States. Some of these collaborations have occurred since his arrival at UCLA, where he teaches university students.

This interview is full of valuable stories and life lessons that communicate the vast wisdom of Professor Abhiman Kaushal. In this interview Kaushal discusses his musical trajectory from his early life growing up in an artistic family to his acquisition of tabla skills and manifestation of these skills in India and abroad. He comments on his experiences with both dedicated practice and performance and shares stories about collaboration, including thoughts about both the advantages and difficulties that come along with this type of music-making. Kaushal also shares his thoughts regarding the importance of humility, particularly in music and in speaking to him, it is clear that this has played a part in his great success as a musician.

Oral History Interview Transcript: Abhiman Kaushal

Lily Brown: Okay. So hello. My name is Lily Brown and this is Aaron Goodman and it is 8pm Pacific time here in Los Angeles, California and we are going to be conducting our interview with Professor Abhiman Kaushal who's currently in Taipei, Taiwan. And just a little side note: this interview will be conducted over Zoom as we are currently in the midst of a pandemic.
[00:30] So with that I'd like to welcome Professor Kaushal and—

Abhiman Kaushal: Thank you.

LB: My first question for you, from my own research a little bit about you, I'm aware that you learned tabla from your father. However, I don't know too much more about this and I'm just wondering if you could tell us a little bit more about your life growing up and when you kind of started playing music.

AK: [01:00] So I started from my father. R.B. Kaushal was his name, and my father was a fantastic tabla player, but professionally he was in the Indian Navy. So serving with the Indian [01:15] Navy he had this great passion to learn the music and he learned from a very great master. That master's name was Ustad Amir Hussain Khan. So my father, all his life, pursued tabla, but by the time I was born he had retired [01:30] from the Navy and tabla was all that he was doing and that's how he got me started on the tabla. So my family atmosphere was such that

I grew up in a family of arts. So my mother was a very famous South Indian classical dancer. [01:45] She was very reputed. She had many students, she had over 250 students learning from her. And so we had dance in the family, at the same time we had tabla in the family. So when I was growing up, you know hearing the sounds of my dad practicing tabla, I slowly started [02:00] getting attracted to the drums. So he started me off when I was five years old. And even though he had so much knowledge that he could have taught me all his life, he felt I needed a certain music discipline, [02:15] because at home sometimes as a kid you take things for granted. You don't practice, you want to play with friends, all that. So he took me to a very great master in my city. I grew up in a city called Hyderabad, and just to let you know both [02:30] Lily and Aaron, some of the terms I'll be using today, if you want by email, I'll send you the correct spelling of it like my city Hyderabad, my father's Ustad's name, so that way you can you know, if you need it, you can write it down.

LB: Yeah, that would be great.

AK: [02:46] So, in Hyderabad city, there was a very great master, Ustad, as we call. Ustad Shaik Dawood. So my father took me and put me under him when I was about seven, seven-and-a-half years old. [03:00] And from that point onwards I started learning from the master as well as my father, parallel, and then over a period of time because when I joined my master, he was already quite old. And after learning probably about 10, 11 years from [03:15] him, then he stopped teaching because he had some physical challenges. And then to continue the same lineage, I went to the master's senior-most disciple. Pandit B. Nandkumar. So this has been my trajectory of learning the music. [03:30] Starting from my father, then the master, and then the master's senior-most disciple.

LB: Okay.

AK: So I've been blessed in such a way that they all three of them have taught me a lot of, an abundance of compositions.

LB: [03:45] I guess kind of going off of that, I'm kind of curious if you always knew that you wanted to be a musician and if like coming from a family of musicians, was there ever, I'm assuming there wasn't a lack of support in any way to pursue [04:00] a career in music.

AK: Right, there was never a lack of support, but growing up in a metropolitan city, I was going to one of the best schools in my city, for personal academics. At the same time, at the age of... [04:18] probably about 14, 15 years of age, in my teens... I, in school, high school, I started having a group of friends and that was a distraction for me. For example, that we were doing everything except studying. [04:33] You know, we're not going to school or going to movies and hanging out and all that stuff. So that was a distractive period of my life, but I found that while I was doing that indulging in all those things, tabla was pulling me back. [04:48] It was like a magnet pulling me back in a sense that wherever I was, if it was a movie theater, if it was hanging out with them or sitting in a restaurant eating, my urge was to go back home and practice then. That's all I wanted to do. [05:00] Because that was twirling in my mind all the time. So it came to such a point that I became really desperate, and I went to my father one day. I set off for school. I returned, came back home, and I told him, you know, up straight, that I

[05:15] need to talk to you and Mom, and then I just poured my heart out basically. I said this is what I'm doing, I'm just wasting my time, wasting my energies, and this is what I feel like doing. I don't know if it's the right decision but this is my inner feeling. My father [05:30] spontaneously said, "Okay, just put your school bag inside, go to the music room and play." That's it. That was such a simple solution he gave. My mother, I remember, you know, even though she was a great classical dancer, academically she had done her Master's in economics. [05:45] So she very sweetly urged me, she said, "Why don't you at least get a degree?" And I was very honest with her saying that no, I cannot do it because I know I'd be wasting my time. I don't have that aptitude for academics. Some people can do both, I can't. [06:00] So then she said, "Okay do what you need to do," but they were very wise. They said, "We'll give you one year's time. And we'll watch you in that one year. Let's see how sincere your approach is, and if your approach is sincere, as parents we'll [05:15] support you and if not, you have to go back to academics and pursue a degree." So I guess my approach was sincere, so they encouraged me and then you know, you slowly start your not only practice but you start getting small concerts and you start trying to build [06:30] a career out of music.

LB: Yeah.

AK: So that was my, that was the change, the shift which happened.

LB: Aaron did you want to—

Aaron Goodman: Yeah, I'm curious. [06:45] I think it's kind of funny. You mentioned a period of distraction. I was, one of my questions I wanted to ask, I'm interested in hearing how your relationship with practicing has changed as you've grown. It kind of sounds like, [07:00] the way you've described it. It almost sounds like you've kind of returned to it, at least in that it's something you almost have grown more fond of *[it]*? I'm curious how you would articulate that. I don't want to put words in your mouth.

AK: Okay! No. No, that's fine. [07:18] Practice, right from my early days, that period of time when I was 14, 15, I was urged to go back and practice, till now. My approach to practice has been the same. It's never changed because [07:33] the pull with which I was being pulled back at that age like a magnet, you know that urge to practice, and the urge to practice now is the same. And for example, I never practice because there is a concert [07:48] coming up. I practice because I want to play the music. And it's so much so that it becomes part of the being. That without practice, you don't feel complete, you [08:00] feel somewhere... empty, like something is missing. When I practice, for me personally, I feel very toned, I feel very calm, I feel very centered. And because it—the sounds contribute to some parts of you, it contributes to your overall personality [08:15] and basically if I put it in a nutshell my blood circulates better if I practice. You know, the circulation, everything is better because you feel good about it. You feel good about the music. So my practice is not concert oriented. [08:30] I can be on a free day at home. I can practice for endless amount of hours or if I'm with my family then I just you know, adjust, because when you're with a family, you cannot practice seven, eight hours a day, you know, so you try to...find [08:45] your way, find your time, whenever I have time wherever it is, I just practice.

AG: I'm curious if performing is kind of like a, a different [09:00] "itch to be scratched," I guess, if practicing is one way to kind of exercise and play through the music, is there an extra satisfaction that you might get from... [09:16] from then performing?

AK: There is, there is. I mean, there are two kinds of satisfaction here. When you're practicing, it's more inwards. Because you're analyzing, you're feeling, you're trying to better your sounds, [09:31] all that. So, I call it "inwards." But when you're performing, it's both inwards and outwards because you're performing for an audience, you can't be inwards all the time because that will become very self-centered [09:46] music. It won't be for everyone. So you have to express your music, at the same time be connected within yourself. So that's a very fine balance one has to find. So what happens is... [10:00] When I started my performing career, I remember I asked my teacher one day... I said that I'm getting these small concerts in my city and they're inviting me to play. So how do I impress an audience? How do I, you know, play [10:15] in such a way that they, you know, it comes out good. He said there's nothing like that. There's no impressing the audience. He told me, he says, when you're playing your music in a concert, feel your music. And a moment [10:30] comes when you feel good about what you're playing. The moment that happens, be assured the audience will... will react to it. So, you know, you can try all this... You can try showmanship. You can throw your hands around. You can do all those things, gimmicks, and try to impress [10:45] an audience, but that for—this is like a circus which goes on. But if you really want to touch the audience, you have to touch yourself first with the music. When you touch yourself, it touches the audience. When that happens, that's a great, great satisfaction... because you know, [11:00] that's what you're performing for. You are expressing your music so that you can share it and touch the listeners. So as an approach, you know, sometimes when I'm touring with colleagues or when I meet musicians who I know from India and all over the world, sometimes [11:15] I come across the point when they say that you know, today's concert could have been better, but the audience was so dull. They're not receptive. I never believed that. Always say that you never blame the audience. It is your responsibility. They have taken time to come and listen to you. [11:30] It's your responsibility to touch them. Of course, practically, you can't touch a thousand people at the same time, but you've got to do your best to reach out as much as possible. So my approach has always been never to blame any other factor if the concert is not connecting. [11:45] It is something I have to look within myself. Never blame the listener.

LB: That's very interesting. I'm curious, kind of going more into your experience touring, what has it been [12:00] like collaborating with artists outside of India, I guess, and especially with artists who don't play the same musical traditions that you do.

AK: Right. That's a good question. [12:16] This happened when I joined, when I came to Los Angeles, settled down in the early 90's and eventually when I started teaching at UCLA from the late 90's. Up until then I was a very classical tabla player. That was my identity, [12:31] which still is. It's not changed. But what had happened was, when I joined UCLA, it's such a wonderful department there. Especially when I say not only the students but the faculty there are so esteemed and better-known, you have jazz, world music. [12:46] I slowly started getting invited to collaborate with them. For example, my first year just that day of the event, I got called by my chair at that time saying that, bring your tablas and come to Schoenberg Hall because we have a concert. [13:01] I didn't know what concert this was, but I might as well bring my tablas for

sound check. And I saw Kenny, Kenny Burrell, you know, other faculty, Steve Loza, they were all on stage and doing the sound check. I had a little spot where I needed to set [13:16] up my tabla and I sat there, and then slowly I went to Kenny and asked him, “Kenny, what are we doing today?” He says, “We are playing music.” I said, “Yeah, I know, but what? Playing what?” He says, “Just play music.” So that's a very, you know, like Kenny's from jazz world and [13:31] that's his approach. Then I went to Steve. I got the same answer and they told me it's in honor of—that concert is in honor of Tito Puente. A legend. I didn't know at that point of my life who Tito Puente was. I was that ignorant. And [13:46] he was there! Tito Puente was there doing his sound check. So then I decided within myself that you know what, don't try to analyze what's going on. Just feel the music and play whatever you feel like playing. And with that approach, it worked out. It worked out. [14:00] Because I was having so much fun, because it's a different sphere of the brain you're using, or the field. So when I collaborate the way I give a— if I can give a metaphor is, if you visualize a tree, a [14:15] tree. The trunk is for me the classical music. That's my foundation. Other branches go out to different genres. So as long as the foundation is strong you can branch out as much as you want because you're not losing your identity. At the same [14:30] time all this branching out contributes to your identity as well. It does. So that's the way I look at it.

LB: I really like that metaphor. I'm wondering if when you first began collaborating [14:45] with other genres of music were there ever any difficulties that came up and was there some way that you were able to overcome those difficulties?

AK: I... you know the thing is, [15:00] when you have to collaborate, there is a certain compromise one has to do because the setting is different. But at the same time I draw the line at a certain point, I can't go beyond a certain line of compromise. So one time I remember [15:15] I got invited to UC Santa Barbara by a student who's there who... you know, you must have heard of the Earth Day Festival. Earth Day. So he invited me, he's a singer-songwriter. He said I've [15:30] composed this song. I would like to have tablas on it. I said, okay, you know, so he came to my place, we rehearsed, sounded good, so I went for the festival. And the atmosphere was such, it was not conducive to my, my kind of personality. [15:45] Because you know, they were all very free-flowing if you can imagine what that means. So I was not comfortable with that. But at that point of my life, I was going through some financial hardships, so I needed the pay I was getting from that concert. [16:00] So I decided to close your eyes, play your part, get the check, go home. That was my approach. And I did that, I closed my eyes, I was playing my part. Suddenly, I heard this big banging on stage. It was open air concert. I got [16:15] startled and opened my eyes and saw and the singer took his beautiful electric guitar and he was smashing it on the stage. That's it. At that moment, I just, middle of the song, I picked up my tabla, just walked off to the parking [16:30] lot. And I could see the drummer saying, “Abhi. Abhi, where are you going, man?” And I just left. And the singer saw me leaving. He stopped his concert and he came running behind me to the parking lot. And then I told him, I said, “please I don't want to talk anything right now. I'm very [16:45] disturbed. We'll talk some other time.” Then he, he couldn't figure it out. He said, “What did I do wrong? Why are you leaving, man? In the middle of the song?” I said just tell me one thing... “For us, you know, from Indian music every instrument is equal to God for us. That's how we approach our music.” [17:00] And he was smashing an instrument, which for me was sacrilege. So I said, “Why did you do that? You have such a beautiful guitar, why were you...” he said the same thing, he said, “Did you see the

audience, man, they were in a slumber. I needed [17:15] to wake them up.” So I said “Probably you should have smashed your head. That would have woken them up. Why the instrument? It's such a beautiful—” So I was really, really disturbed. So that was one concert I remember I just walked off, and he came a couple of weeks [17:30] later to my house to apologize to me and then a couple of years down the road, he invited me again to collaborate with him, and this time he was he was extra, extra careful—too much careful. Everything he's doing he was asking me, “Abhi is this okay, man? Is this okay?” [17:45] I said, “Yeah, it's fine. It's fine.” Because that second concert he did in an auditorium, in a concert hall, which was nice. It was pleasant. So sometimes when you collaborate, it happens, you know in this... in the Rock world or the Western world [18:00] sometimes they do this, the instrument smash. They're used to it, but I'm not used to it. So where do you draw the line is where you feel either satisfied within yourself, and if you feel not satisfied, disturbed, then... You can't compromise after a certain [18:15] point. So those are—but for the most part, a lot of my collaborations I've done... See the thing is, in my music, the way I've been taught by my master is: perform, do it in certain conducive atmosphere. By which I mean, [18:30] where people are not eating, drinking, that kind of stuff, like clubs for example. So some of my musician friends from India, they do that. Probably it's okay with them. But since my master told me not to do it, I cannot do it. That is why I stick to a format. If I'm [18:45] playing with hip-hop, if I'm playing with rap, if I'm recording with them and all that, I make sure the atmosphere—I tell them up front that this is where I'm comfortable at. If you still need me, I will come. And for the most part it works out.

LB: [19:00] So it's, I guess you'd say then you're playing primarily presentational music, and not so much the participatory music where... I guess we learned about presentational music as having that distinction between audience and performer. [19:15] So would you say that that's mostly what your performances consist of?

AK: Well, I don't see that as a distinction. You know, I see it more as a merge.

LB: Okay.

AK: More as a... and like I was saying earlier, [19:30] because when you are performing your music, at least for me, there needs to be a certain connect with the listener. It is distinct in a certain sense, like you use the right word. But the same time it's not different. It is connected. It's merged within one. So whether I'm collaborating [19:45] with the music or, like in a studio, or performing in a concert hall, the approach is the same. There has to be a connect with what we are doing then something meaningful comes out of it musically.

LB: Yeah, that makes sense.

AG: [20:02] I had remembered that story you told, that kind of Santa Barbara horror story and it had kind of made me thought of a question that it might be a big question to throw in your lap, pretty open-ended, [20:17] but I'm curious if there's some concise words of advice you could give musicians, especially musicians, I suppose like the guy who smashed his guitar, what [20:32] advice could you give that is concise and I suppose universal, is maybe what I'm getting at? Is there advice you have where, if you don't have time to give someone all the insider knowledge [20:47] necessary to be the most respectful bandmate? And I'm curious if there are

any kind of quick rules that you can think of that [21:00] you say: this is a safe way to approach music cross-culturally, perhaps?

AK: So, where I come from, it's a very straight, simple tenet we follow: sound is God. Period. [21:16] God for everybody could be different things, right. And at this point of my life, you know it probably happens as you're maturing, sometimes I sit and think [21:31] like, it's a non-judgmental approach sometimes then. Who's to know what is right? You know because everyone's got their own approach to do things. I would give advice to someone who's seeking knowledge from me. Or let's say [21:46] it's a musician who's looking up to me, not exactly like a mentor, but okay, looking up to me. What I would say, you know, music is so vast, whatever genre you're playing. It's so vast that always [22:00] try to be behind the music, never try to be ahead of the music. When you're behind the music, then you keep learning. You keep growing as a musician because there's so much to evolve. The moment either ego or whatever [22:15] other factors come in and you try to go ahead of the music, then it's a downhill slide after that. So one of the ways, you know for us when you're learning in India, back in India, humility is very important. Humility. Being humble. It's imposed on us [22:30] in a very nice way. The reason it's imposed is because you have to have the humble approach to soak in so much. If you don't have that approach, then you lose yours and come out the way. So in a very simple way I would say any musician who would come to me is because everybody [22:45] has to grow. No matter how mastered he is or how young musician he or she is, everyone has to evolve and grow because there's so much to do and so much to learn. Only way for me, I feel you can learn is always follow the music, be behind the music, keep pursuing it. [23:00] Then you see it takes you to different directions. It shows different ways. But if you try to go ahead of it, you lose your way. Does that answer your question, Aaron?

AG: Yeah, I think I think that's probably... [23:17] That's the best answer I could have thought of.

AK: Yeah, it's, you know, it's—I don't like to, you know, kind of impose on different people my approaches to music because like I said earlier, [23:32] you know, everyone's got their own approach which I respect. And especially if I'm touring around the world or if I'm settling in a different country, I can't take my same package and say, "This is the right way," because that culture, that community, it's a different [23:47] approach right? It's more, you know, it's a different kind of... sometimes for example, when I joined UCLA. Kenny, Steve, they're all colleagues. We [24:00] were all in the ethno department, jazz department, and here it's all first name basis. I would say. Hey Kenny, how are you? Hey, Steve, how are you? But India, that's not the way. India if somebody, even if there's a colleague older to you, you always have to be respectful. There are certain [24:15] phrases you use. So that kind of a thing, I had to adapt when I came to the West, because like—Aaron, if you might know this, if you call me and you say "Abhiman-ji," right? "Ji" is a respectful term. I cannot say "Kenny-ji." [24:30] I cannot say "Steve-ji" because they'll say, "What is 'ji'?" No, for them, it's awkward. So, I stopped using those because somewhere I have to draw a bridge. A cultural bridge where I can make that transition into that culture, at the same time keep my respect for them as well.

AG: [24:46] That's an interesting point. I think the example of kind of linguistically addressing somebody is a, [25:00] is a neat example, but I'm curious if there are other changes you've made

in, as you've adapted your own kind of master teacher education as [25:15] you've adapted it to a class full of university students. I'm curious if there have been some clashes, some things that are, that you feel are missing from the classroom or something that you may think is added perhaps?

AK: [25:32] Yeah, that's interesting question because obviously I have learned in the traditional format. But at the same time, when you are teaching in a university, you cannot keep the same format, you have to adapt. So how did I do that is, when I got the [25:47] offer I consulted, I ask my master back in India, that I have such a wonderful offer, should I do it? He said, of course you have to do it. It's a great opportunity. You can spread the music to share the music. [26:00] Teach them properly. At the same time, this is the metaphor he used: He said remember one thing when you're teaching a group of students. It's like the five fingers of your hand. They're all part of your hand, but everyone's capacity is [26:15] different. So according to each student, mold your teaching, even though it's in a group. And that worked out so well for me. Because you see in a classroom setting, Aaron, you've been part of this, like let's say that 10, 12 students. Everyone's got a different [26:30] potential. I'm not saying good or bad but different potential. So as a teacher I have to tap into that and see: this student, this sound, this composition is appealing. Go with this, you know, so that kind of approach. [26:46] Another approach I've taken, and this is my personal view, is in a university, of course, every student has got different majors. For example, some are neuroscience, some are bio, some are econ, all that. [27:00] But for me, the moment they enter the room, the door, for me they are only tabla players. Nothing else. When I take that approach then I can give my hundred percent to them. If I start catering to the thought that over, they've got [27:15] a final, econ major, I'm sympathetic, but my teaching gets compromised, because now I'm catering to those thoughts, you know, I'm sympathetic to it. But once you enter the classroom for the duration of that class, you're only a tabla player. So these are some [27:30] personal decisions and shifts I've made in teaching. And eventually what happens is, you know, some students get too deep into it. They've graduated but they still want to learn then that becomes like a mentor-student relationship. [27:45] It transits to that. But one of the experiences I've had eight, nine, maybe ten years ago, there was a pianist, in our department, jazz pianist. I won't take his name for [28:00] personal reasons but incredible musician. Incredible musician and one of the most loveliest guys. Always, you know, very pleasant. So I would see him, when that time I used to teach in the gamelan room. I would see him outside the windows just listening [28:15] to the music, to my class. And always with a smile and happy. So one day I invited him inside, I said if you want to listen, sit on a chair on the side and listen to it, you don't have to stand outside. And after the class he approached me and he says, "I [28:30] want to learn tabla." I said sure, join us next quarter. And this guy was so good in his jazz piano that when used to practice, faculty if they come to know they would go running and listen to him. He was that [28:45] good. So this student became my student. And then I saw, eventually after a few weeks, he was spending hours and hours in the gamelan room. Sometimes just by himself playing *na, na, na, na* [AK gestures with his finger as if tapping the tabla] or something. Or just [29:00] holding the drum, cleaning it, just being with the drum. And I started thinking now, where is this going? I mean in one way it was nice for me that this wonderful musician, the student is, you know, gravitating towards tabla, but at the same time [29:15] I wanted to see, where is this exactly going? And sure enough almost towards end of the quarter—when he was playing in the class, he was very musically talented, but the sounds he was trying to get out of the tabla were not suitable. They were there but not [29:31] what one would elicit the proper

sounds out of the tabla. He was kind of a buffed out guy, and you know, he had certain finger techniques, but it would seem that he needs a lot of effort in bringing out some sounds, which is natural. So one day towards the end of the quarter, he said, [29:46] “I need to talk to you.” We went to Kerckhoff. When we sat down, and I could see this coming, he said, “I don't know what's happening to me, this instrument. I'm so much in love with that I want to give up piano and [30:00] dedicate my time to tabla. What do you say?” And thank God I saw this coming. As you know, a wonderful musician, if I said, “Yeah, sure, do it,” you know, what would happen after that would be my responsibility. [30:16] So I told him, I said, “do it, don't give up your piano because that's your identity as a musician. You've done it so well. You've sacrificed so much of your life already into it and you're doing very well in it. And also don't give up tabla. Pursue tabla [30:31] but whatever influences tabla is giving you, try to contribute it to your piano. I will guide you in that.” So for the next two years, that's what I did and then he graduated, then he started touring Asia and all that, he became very famous, but that was a period which was very, it was a very testing period for [30:46] me. Because he is a wonderful student at the same time. The phase he was going through, you know, if I said, okay give up everything and if he dedicated his life to tabla, what would happen after seven, eight years after he, you know graduates and moves on? [31:00] The struggle will still be there. He would do, he would do the music but not at the pace it's required. See what I'm saying? So these are the challenges of teaching sometimes.

LB: I would like [31:15] to let you know our meeting will close out in about six minutes just because it has a time limit on the zoom meetings, but we do have a couple more questions that I think we can [31:30] fit in.

AK: I'll make my answer short.

LB: No, that's okay. We enjoy hearing your long answers. Just a little bit related to our class and some things that we've talked about, we talked about [31:45] some of the debates over authenticity and music and whether or not a traditional piece of music remains authentic if it is changed in any way and I'm curious for you as someone who has [32:00] participated in many different collaborations. What is your, I guess, what your opinion is on this? Do you think traditional musical styles like tabla maintain their authenticity if you're adapting them at all in a sort of collaboration?

AK: [32:16] As long as you don't lose yourself. In a collaboration, you cannot be authentic. You have to collaborate with the feel of that with which you're collaborating with. So for example, if I'm playing with, let's say jazz. If I play my classical compositions, it won't match. [32:31] The traditional compositions. So I have to adapt to the feel of the song I'm playing with, which means that I'm not authentic and if you use that word, I'm not a traditional tabla player, I've crossed over into another genre. So if you can make that shift and come back then you're [32:46] good. Because you're not losing your authenticity. You're just branching out. You're just reaching out to that music and coming back.

LB: That makes sense. [33:00] And then I'm also wondering if the COVID-19 pandemic has affected, I guess your relationship with music at all. I mean, I know you're not in the U.S. right now, but has [33:15] this relationship been affected at all? Have you found ways that you can

connect with audiences that are, that create in any way the same feeling of live performance? Or like, what is your outlook [33:30] on the future of live music I guess?

AK: I mean COVID-19, one of the obvious things is that I miss seeing all of you in person, you know when I'm on campus, being with students, that energy, definitely I miss that. But being in Taiwan, I'm also teaching in a couple of universities here for [33:45] which I have to go to campus. So that's kind of compensating that you know, it's—at least I'm meeting students here on a weekly basis. And concerts I'm performing here for live audience because Taiwan is very secure regarding pandemic. They're doing very well, so you know life is in general, [34:00] normal here. But a lot of my musician friends are playing online concerts on Facebook or YouTube and that's a very wonderful adaptive... because rather than sit at home and sulk that, you know, there are no concerts and this and that [34:15] they've made this very intelligent shift to play the music, of course, they're missing a live audience, but it's something for the time being. And as human beings we all have hope that this thing passes soon. You know, we have some good news coming out, some vaccines are coming. [34:30] Some cures are coming. So at least that gives the feeling that this pandemic phase is temporary, it will pass. So with that hope it can go forward.

LB: That's a very positive outlook. [24:48] I think we have time for one more question. What do you think Aaron?

AG: Yeah, I bet we could squeeze in another. [35:02] I'm trying to decide, what would be our best wrap-up question?

AK: You are both on the right [35:17] of my screen and the camera is in front. So I keep looking here. Is that okay for the video?

AG: Yeah. Well, that's fine.

LB: It's okay. Did you find a good one to wrap up with?

AG: Yeah sure. This is— [35:32] It says we have less than a minute unfortunately. What do you think should we squeeze in another?

AK: Do it, do it!

AG: Okay, I'm curious if on tours all around the [35:47] world. Surely some places you visited, your first visit may have been for the purpose of a tour. So I'm curious if the context [36:00] upon which you visit a place. I wonder if that—if your musical purpose there affects the way you come to understand the place you visit.

AK: Not really, not really. Because [36:15] the music you are playing is the same. For my first visit out of India it was London. To me that freshness of seeing a foreign land, foreign, you know, soil and foreign place. Till today it remains fresh for me. London, I have that soft corner for. Well, that's where I first went [36:30] but all over the world, whatever music I played, whichever place I try to do, you know, exactly what I express but never, you know influence

with that place in the region like Japan or wherever. Just played my music. [36:47] Yeah, so then you both ask very good questions. Thank you.

AG: Thank you!

LB: Thank you so much for taking the time.

AK: Yes, hopefully we will connect in person in future. [37:00] Happy Thanksgiving.